

## **North America – Location & Boundaries (Summary)**

from the film *North America – Location and Boundaries*, Mexus Education, Ltd.

- North America is the third largest continent in the world after Asia and Africa. It includes the second and the fourth largest countries in the world, namely Canada and the United States of America.
- The Americas are called the 'New World' because they were discovered fairly recently. Christopher Columbus landed on one of the islands of the Bahamas, off the mainland of the continent in 1492.
- Christopher Columbus wanted to find a sea route to India. He was a man of vision and was confident that by sailing across the oceans on a round earth, he would reach India, the land of gold, diamonds, spices and fine silks.
- Columbus was certain that he had found India and believed that he had landed on one of the islands near India. He called the islands the 'Indies' and the people who lived there 'Indians', who came to be known as the 'red Indians' because of their rugged complexion. They were natives of America and today prefer to be called 'Native Americans'.
- Columbus made four more voyages of discovery. In 1498, he found the continent of South America, landing near the mouth of the Orinoco River. Until his death in 1506, Columbus believed he had found the sea route to India, never realizing that he had discovered a New World.
- America was named in 1507 after an Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, who landed on the mainland of the continent. A German geographer, Martin Waldseemüller, unaware of the voyages of Columbus, used this name to honor the Italian navigator Amerigo who explored the coasts of South America and the Caribbean during 1499 – 1502.
- Long before Columbus, the Vikings, who were fearless seafaring people from Scandinavia, founded colonies in Greenland as early as 1000 CE. However, America remained forgotten and isolated until Columbus rediscovered it in 1492.

- North America includes Canada, USA, Mexico, and the seven countries of Central America. It also includes Greenland, which lies northeast of Canada, and is a former Danish colony that is now self-governing.
- The countries of Central America are Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Central America forms a land bridge or **isthmus** between Mexico and South America, and is considered part of North America.
- The many **tropical islands** of the Caribbean like Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico also belong to North America.
- North America lies between 7° North and 84° North **latitudes**. The continent is broad in the north and tapering towards the south.
- The Tropic of Cancer passes through Mexico and the Arctic Circle through the northern part of Canada. The continent lies entirely in the Northern Hemisphere in the **North Temperate Zone**.
- North America extends between 20° West and 180° West longitudes. It lies entirely in the Western Hemisphere. It has a great longitudinal extent, which results in five **time zones**.
- Some of the important **bays** and **gulfs** are the Gulf of Mexico, Hudson Bay, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the Gulf of California.
- There are many **islands** in the Arctic Ocean lying to the north of the continent. Of these, Greenland is the largest. Some of the other islands are Baffin Island, Victoria Island, and Ellesmere Island which belong to Canada. The island of Newfoundland lies off the east coast of Canada.
- The islands of the West Indies form a chain of small islands in the Caribbean. Together these are known as the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles.
- Nature has been very kind to this part of the world known as North America. For instance, multicolored heat-resistant algae and bacteria flourish in the mineral-rich hot waters of Grand Prismatic Spring in Yellowstone National Park. Natural **hot springs** that intermittently eject columns of water and steam are called **geysers**.

- North America plays host to four major hot and dry **deserts**, the features of which are quite fascinating. Scouring winds work on the face of the deserts, sandblasting rocky outcrops into bizarre shapes and blowing sand **dunes** along in ever-changing patterns. The desert dunes of the Atacama blow into patterns like tide-washed sand.
- Another interesting feature of these deserts is an **inselberg**, which is a mass of hard rock that resists erosion and stands alone.
- A **wadi** is a dry **gully** or riverbed that is formed in a desert environment. Wadis, cut by a stream, are generally dry year-round, except after a rain.
- **Mesas** are large flat-topped areas with steep sides.
- Another feature of the dry deserts is an **oasis**, which is an area made fertile by a constant spring or stream. A **butte**, which is a small, flat-topped and isolated outcrop is another striking natural feature found in North America. Two buttes known as the Mittens reach skyward in Monument Valley on the Utah-Arizona border.